

## EDITORIAL

And the Beat Goes On.... The Inglewood Police Incident

Update – July 22, 2002

By Assemblymember Jerome E. Horton

(First in a series)

By now we have all viewed the graphic images of 16-year-old Donovan Jackson being punched and slammed into a car by Inglewood Police Officer Jeremy Morse. Images of that incident have been aired incessantly on local and national television. As a result, investigations by the Inglewood Police, Los Angeles County sheriffs, the District Attorney and the U.S. Justice Department have been generated. In addition, I have asked the Attorney General to oversee and monitor the investigations and will be serving as the co-chair of the recently established Speaker's Commission on Police Conduct.

The main purpose of the Commission is to examine the use of force by California police agencies with the aim of improving policies and procedures to ensure the safety and civil rights of those who are arrested. The newly established Commission held its first meeting on Friday, July 19<sup>th</sup> in Los Angeles. As co-chair of the Commission, I have already begun to identify and evaluate various solutions. Through a series of articles, it is my intent to share information regarding possible solutions, as well as information that will assist in the overall evaluation and analysis of the system and the situation.

As an Inglewood city council member, one of the concepts that I advocated and supported was community policing. I did so because I felt, and still do, that the closer a policeman is to the community, the easier it is for he/she to carry out their job. This philosophy encourages the top cop to interact with the community and get to know as many people as possible on a first name basis. The police chief must heartily embrace community policing and ensure that the philosophy trickles down to the beat officer. He should know his officer and his constituents like the points on his badge.

As your Assembly member, I worked to secure funds to reinforce community policing. I envisioned that these centers would evolve into police substations that would bring the police officers closer to the community. My goal was to have the officers at the four community centers on a daily basis interacting with the community leaders and youth. Unfortunately, the majority of these centers now operate less than 20 hours a week. This leads me to doubt if the law enforcement leadership continues to support the idea of community policing for the city of Inglewood. As noted USC Professor Irwin Chemerinsky states, this is a "key way to change the "us" against "them" mentality that too often plagues police departments." When approached with the "small town sheriff mentality," it makes it easier to chart the "pulse of the community". If this type of community policing were in effect, a situation, such as the Donovan Jackson case, may never have happened, or could possibly have been detected prior to its occurrence.

But it did happen. And, in its aftermath, one of the solutions I am considering is Whistleblower protection legislation. Although it is in its initial development stages, this legislation would be a double-edged sword. It would protect law enforcement officers that report police abuses as well as citizens. This would encourage the opening up of the “blue code of silence”, and provide for anonymous tips regarding rogue police officers. The key is to ensure that all of those who work at upholding the law by presenting the truth are provided an environment that is free from retaliation. (In next article: Solutions to conquer systemic challenges)